WORLD CHRONICLE

UNITED NATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DURATION: 28'07" TRANSCRIPT AS BROADCAST

PROGRAMME: **"WORLD CHRONICLE"**

GUEST: Alex Marshall, Chief, Editorial, Publications and Media Services Branch, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

JOURNALISTS: Roy Murphy, TV New Zealand
Judith Aita, USIA Press Service
Hector Igarza, Prensa Latina

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

SYNOPSIS

UN POPULATION FUND

In its 1992 Report on the State of World Population, the United Nations Population Fund or UNFPA, calls for action to balance population, consumption, development and yet protect the environment. Alex Marshall, Chief of the Editorial, Publications and Media Services Branch of UNFPA highlights the importance of education and the improvement of social and economic conditions in reducing family size and curbing population explosion. UNFPA, Mr. Marshall says, works with other UN agencies on measures that slow population growth and improve the quality of life especially for women and children.

"WORLD CHRONICLE" is produced by the Information Products Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.

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Programme No. 465 Recorded on 7 April 1992

VOICE: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns and this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

World population has been increasing at an alarming rate reaching more than 5 billion people. Most of the planet's population live in the developing world. This phenomenal increase will undoubtedly have serious political, economic as well as environmental implications not only for the heavily populated developing regions but for the entire world. In its 1992 Report on the State of World Population, the United Nations Population Fund, or UNFPA, calls for action to balance population, consumption, development and yet protect the environment.

Our guest today, Alex Marshall, is Chief of the Editorial, Publications and Media Services Branch of UNFPA. A national of the United Kingdom, Mr. Marshall will be interviewed here at United Nations headquarters in New York by: Roy Murphy of TV New Zealand; Judith Aita of USIA Press Service and; Hector Igarza of Prensa Latina.

Before we talk with Mr. Marshall, let's look at an aspect of one country's efforts to tackle its population problem. Our correspondent Steve Whitehouse reports.

NARRATION: Government centres are the only place the poor of Panama City can get health care. Zuleika Guzman brings her baby Eduard in for his check-up. With her is a pregnant friend. They're unmarried teenage mothers.

While downtown Panama City has the air of high-rise prosperity, the reality for most of the country's population is one of poverty. Increasing teenage pregnancy is part of social problems that include widespread unemployment and drug abuse.

The health centres are trying to find answers. Helped by the UN Population Fund, they've set up special programmes for adolescent mothers, both before and after the birth, as Zuleika Guzman explained:

GUZMAN: (In Spanish)
"They teach us about family planning. They give us exercises to do to get us ready for labour. And lectures about the baby, how to take care of and nurse the baby..."

NARRATION: There are also programmes for older mothers, 35 years or more who face greater risks with pregnancy. And the educational component includes skits to underscore the dangers of drug addiction.

Due to the absence of day care centres, volunteers like Alexis play an essential role as baby sitters while mothers like Zuleika learn vocational skills. The Centre runs a support group so mothers can share experiences. There are millions of unmarried teenage mothers worldwide and they face special problems, says UNFPA head, Dr. Nafis Sadik:

SADIK: "These young girls, you know, 14, 15 and 16, then drop out of school and in fact their

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entire life is blighted by the fact that they became pregnant and some of them then just go on serially to have one pregnancy after another."

NARRATION: Zuleika however, is fortunate. Baby Eduard's father is very much in the picture, giving financial and emotional support. Her mother has fully accepted the new addition to the family. The programme gives contraceptive advice to ensure that pregnancy for teenagers in Panama is a matter of choice, not chance. In common with health services in much of the developing world, Panama is trying to cope, as best it can, with the consequences of poverty and social breakdown.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Marshall, I understand that you are the editor of "The State of World Population 1992". I wonder if you could give us a brief rundown of the highlights of this document?

MARSHALL: Yes, in fact, Michael, you put it pretty well in your introduction. We're facing at the same time an unprecedented rise in numbers, perhaps 95 million or more a year between now and the end of the century. World population rising from about five and a half billion at the middle of this year to well over 6 billion by the turn of the century. At the same time, an even greater number than ever before are still living in poverty -- over 1 billion people live in absolute poverty according to the World Bank. At the same time, we're seeing a higher level of consumption on the part of the 20 percent who live in the developed countries, in the northern countries and they are responsible for the great bulk of the pollution and waste products which are currently threatening our environment. This is a triple problem, it would be a sufficient problem by itself even to defeat poverty but at the same time, we have to try to meet the legitimate

aspirations of the 3 billion people who are in the middle, the people who are neither rich nor very poor and who have reasonable expectations of a better life. How is this to be done without condemning the world to a totally polluted, maybe totally unlivable existence. That's the question asked by "The State of World Population Report 1992".

LITTLEJOHNS: So the emphasis in the latest report is on the impact of population growth on the environment?

MARSHALL: Population growth and distribution and what can be done on the population side of things to help solve these problems.

LITTLEJOHNS: Now, the UN Fund for Population Activities which is now generally known as the Population Fund, has been around for quite a number of years and it seemed as if you were having fairly substantial success in curbing the population explosion. Has the situation suddenly gotten out of hand again?

MARSHALL: No, it hasn't, Michael. In the first place, I wouldn't say that UNFPA was having substantial success, I would say the developing countries themselves were having substantial success.

LITTLEJOHNS: But with your encouragement.

MARSHALL: With a certain amount of encouragement from us and of course, the countries who support us -- over 100 of them, the bigger donors of course are in the north, the industrialized countries -- but the bulk of the money, the bulk of the resources going into population programmes comes from the developing countries and they have been working extremely hard to improve health care, to improve education. Both of those things are crucial to slow population growth. They've been attacking rapid population growth directly, promoting family planning, birth

spacing -- it goes under different names in different places -- and yes, until fairly recently, I think, we assumed that progress was being made on a fairly consistent level. What has disturbed us in the last 2 or 3 years are increasing indications that not only has the decline in population plateaued but the actual numbers being added to world population are increasing year by year and that has led the United Nations to make some really rather pessimistic projections out into the next century so that for instance, instead of assuming that world population will level off at around 10 billion -- very roughly twice today's level -- by the century from now, they now tell us that it won't level off perhaps until the middle of the following century and the level could be in the 20s or even higher.

LITTLEJOHNS: The 22nd century?

MARSHALL: Indeed.

MURPHY: It seems to me you're describing a paradoxical situation that cannot be resolved because on one hand you have developed countries with populations that are relatively low or even declining and they're well-educated people, well-trained and they're relatively well-off, most of them, and where the population increase is coming from is the countries that have vast populations of ill-educated people who are badly off, unskilled and we're leading to a situation which is the reverse of Darwin's theory, namely the survival of the un-fittest. Do you see the fact that we're going to that situation where the un-fittest are going to take over and the rest of us will be swamped?

MARSHALL: "Un-fittest" is a bit of a value judgement. You know, back in 1972 when Bangladesh became independent, it was written off by some people who didn't know anything about Bangladesh and probably had never been there.

LITTLEJOHNS: "International basket case", I think was the term used.

MARSHALL: Yes, twenty years later, Bangladesh is still very much there despite everything that nature and human beings can throw at it. I would say that demonstrates not un-fitness but fitness to survive. Bangladesh has actually been attacking its population problem quite seriously for the last ten years with some success but they're hampered by the very factors that you mentioned and one of the things that we point out in the report and one of the things that UNFPA and Dr. Sadik are keenest on is recognizing that you don't just go about controlling population. You have to attack poverty directly, you have to improve health directly, you have to improve education directly and particularly for women.

MURPHY: Can I just put it another way, on a more positive side, you mentioned in your report that in the last twenty years or so, you've discovered that within a decade, you can actually turn around this fertility problem. Where has that happened and how have you done it?

MARSHALL: It's happened in Thailand and once again, I would say that we haven't done it, the Thais have done it. Thailand is one example, you might say China is another though over a somewhat longer period, Indonesia looks like being another, Sri Lanka has been very successful -- although a very poor country -- in slowing down fertility. The state of Kerala in India -- if you compare Kerala with its richer, northern neighbours in India, you'll find that Kerala has done rather better on all these fronts I was talking about -- poverty, health education, family planning and population growth.

AITA: You have listed a lot of specific goals in the report -- improved education, more access to family planning services -- and you've talked about governments trying to provide

services but what about the basic problem, the underlying change of personal and cultural attitudes that you have to confront. We can sit here and discuss this but it comes down to the family, and in some areas where, say, for example, a male attitude that your show of virility is how many children you have. Where has that fit into this and how is that progressing?

MARSHALL: That too could be changed. Ages ago in Tunisia, President Bourguiba went on radio and said "look the population of Tunisia is exploding, the rabbit population is also exploding, are you men or rabbits?" And that had a certain effect because of his personal prestige. In a more systematic way, the government of Mexico in the late 70's went about attacking their population problem and specifically the machismo ethic which is very common in Latin America and basically they were saying to men, is it more manly to have a lot of children who are illiterate and have no hope in life or to have 2 or 3 children who have books in their hands and shoes on their feet and have some hope of some chance for the future? And that message has got across.

AITA: But from some of the things you're saying in reviving your estimates of where the population is going to go, it doesn't seem like that is having an effect. All countries haven't gotten the message. What you're saying in answer to one question and what you're saying in answer to mine don't seem to mesh.

MARSHALL: The problem is that you can be succeeding and failing at the same time in this business. The developing countries and the agencies including UNFPA who have been helping have actually succeeded in reducing family size. Because numbers are increasing all the time, the actual numbers being added are increasing. That's the problem. You're working with a smaller percentage each year perhaps but it's a percentage which will never grow in base so the actual numbers are growing all the time and we are in the position of the fellow whose bathtub is overflowing and

the taps are full on and the drain isn't big enough to take all the water that's coming in from the taps. The problem is how you turn the taps off if they're jammed. That's the problem. The water level is rising the whole time.

LITTLEJOHNS: The programme is **WORLD CHRONICLE**. Our guest is Alex Marshall, Chief of the Editorial, Publications and Media Services Branch of the UN Population Fund.

IGARZA: Mr. Marshall, how is it possible to improve the conditions of over 1 billion persons who are the poorest in the world in the existing relations between north and south?

MARSHALL: I think this one of the key questions and this is one of the reasons why we've made such an issue of it in the report. I think the industrialized countries simple have to recognize that the very small amount that they're providing in development assistance has to be increased. That's point one. Point two is that they have to recognize that the targets that they themselves set 20 years ago have not only not been met, but their performance has actually declined over the years. Point three is to recognize that we are not only talking about aid, international assistance, if you count in debt flows, debt repayments from south to north, you find that the flow has gone into reverse. There's more money leaving the south than is reaching it from the north in the form of aid so we have the paradoxical situation of the poor southern countries subsidizing the rich, northern ones. This is not something which can reasonably continue. Then you have the whole issue of trade (the General Agreements on Tariff and Trade), the Uruguay Round has been stalled now for months, basically because two groups of northern countries can't agree and that is holding back the development of trade between developing countries and the industrialized countries. So all these issues have to be taken into account. Eventually, the problem won't be solved unless there is a real transfer of resources from north to south.

MURPHY: You talk in the report and when you've been answering the questions, there seems to be a twin kind of approach which is both health and education and yet when you look at the values that society or the world plays on these things, they place much heavier emphasis on health which means people survive, rather than education which doesn't give them the ability to survive well. Is there any way of changing that round? For instance, doctors get paid much more than teachers. Is there any way of reversing this?

MARSHALL: Yes, and there is also an urban rule bias -- urban health and education services tend to be much better than rural ones and one of the developing countries' biggest problems, as anybody from Latin America will tell you, is the burgeoning cities. Eighty-three percent of future population growth will probably happen in the cities so one of the challenges is for governments and for the public at large to understand that education, although it isn't a life and death matter in the short term, it certainly is in the long term. It can literally mean the difference between life and death for a woman in, let's say, Colombia. Women in Colombia are far less likely to die as a result of pregnancy if they have five or six years education. That is a life and death matter and then there is a further issue that all of these subjects -- education and health -- are typically treated by the international community as sort of secondary as if they were sort of add-ons, luxuries which you can have once development had taken place. The problem is that development would not take place if you don't have viable systems of health and education and again, particularly for women. One of the reasons why development will not take place is that you can't do anything about population growth.

AITA: To follow up on Roy's question, is there any effort or has UNFPA or any of the other UN organizations that give aid, made any effort to put some kind of conditionality on development aid? For example, part of the project must include education or

projects to women, in other words, that you've got to see something a little more tangible -- x percent of the programme must go for some kind of training or basic education for elementary-school children.

MARSHALL: I think conditionality is very difficult to implement. You risk breaching one of the cardinal principles on which we work in developing countries. The principle on which we work in all developing countries, 150 of them, is that we are invited to help with a programme which comes from the countries. Their own programme must be that way -- population, family planning. You're dealing with some very strict personal values here and national values, cultural values, very important basic values, and you don't interfere with those so I don't think that you can put that kind of conditionality on it. If you can put a conditionality on it, maybe it should be in the reverse direction. Maybe you should say to the northern aid-giving countries, you should be giving a certain percentage of your assistance to these sorts of programmes, to rural education, to education for women, to rural health programmes, not to expensive hospitals in the cities but to outreach programmes which are much less visible, much less easily sold to the voters at home but much more valuable to the people in the country concerned.

IGARZA: As a follow-up, in the case of the most affected population, the children, how does the Population Fund co-ordinate some kind of activities with UNICEF, the World Health Organization, these kinds of organizations that have a direct relation with the population growth?

MARSHALL: From establishment twenty years ago, we've always worked closely with all the agencies plus ILO (International Labour Organisation) and FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) and anybody else that thinks they might have an interest in population including UNIDO (UN Industrial Development Organization) -- we've

even had small programmes with them. Since UNICEF is interested in mothers and children, and since WHO is interested in health and since UNESCO is interested in education, those are the agencies with whom we've had the closest contact. We do joint projects with all of them. Each of those agencies executes UNFPA-funded projects. In fact, we really raise the money voluntarily from anywhere we can find it, mostly from the countries of Europe, Australasia, Canada, Japan, and we channel it through these agencies or through governments but the expertise which UNICEF has, for example, in education and health and family planning, has been invaluable, and similarly with WHO.

MURPHY: One of the most striking things in your report, I think, is that you used to think that it was the non-renewable resources that would run out first, like oil and so forth, but the fact is continually finding more things and now, what you're most worried about are the renewable sources -- fresh water and fresh air and things like that. Has anybody dared to calculate whether there's a cut-off point in the human population -- x number of billion and beyond that, we're now in a disaster area?

MARSHALL: Yes, I think the calculations are now being made. Back in 1982, FAO, with funding from UNFPA, did a study of land-carrying capacities which is the only study to this day that I really know about and they found that, under the most optimum conditions, there would still be 19 countries that couldn't feed themselves out of their own resources by the end of the century. That gives you some idea of the scale of the problem. That's land. Water is beginning to be understood to be a crucial resource which is in danger. The world is nine-tenths water, isn't it? So we've always assumed that water is essentially unlimited, in fact, it isn't. Usable water like usable land is actually coming to be in short supply. In fact, we estimate in the report that by the beginning of the second quarter of the next century, in 2025, one billion Africans could be facing water scarcity. So we don't yet

understand the dimensions of the water problem, but we're beginning to, and air, of course, is something that will be discussed at the UNCED (UN Conference on Environment and Development) which takes place in Rio in June and one of the key issues is who's causing air pollution and why and how it can be stopped. Air pollution is not something that respects boundaries.

MURPHY: You just mentioned that environment conference, now you bring it up, I understand that there's very little discussion about the populatien question and yet the human population is one of the prime effects on the environment, and we're the ones who cause deforestation and so forth. Why is there no greater emphasis on that?

MARSHALL: We're still hopeful really that we, the international community, will be able to put population where it belongs on Agenda 21, the document which we hope will come out of UNCED. At the moment, the mentions of population, as you say, are few and far between. There are many reasons for that which we don't really have time to go into but basically, the feeling on many sides was, well, this is an environment conference and you're having a population conference in '94, so let's not bother about population now, but as you rightly point out, it's people who make the planet livable or unlivable so population has to be addressed sooner or later.

AITA: We've been talking about the environment and development yet when I think of the UN Population Fund, you think of population, family planning, and the first thing that seems to come into peoples' minds these days is abortion which is such a controversial issue yet there is so much more to family planning and the work of the Population Fund. Has the abortion issue got in your way, has it caused problems for the other things that you're trying to do in your work?

MARSHALL: Yes, it has. In the first place, abortion isn't recognized as a means of family planning. That's been clear for a long time now and because our remit is family planning, UNFPA isn't actually permitted to support programmes which include abortion. So those are the ground rules under which we work. It's also very clear that family planning is one of the best ways of minimizing abortion. The highest levels of abortion are found in the countries which do not have effective, safe, affordable, available means of contraception, and the ability to use them which is the other thing. Contraception can be available but if a woman does not have the choice to use it, if she's being forbidden to use it, in effect, by society or her husband or her mother-in-law or whoever it is, it's not available to her. So family planning has to be available in order to minimize abortion. Abortion has been used, I believe, as a stick with which to beat UNFPA by people who fundamentally don't want people to have the choice over their own fertility, for whatever reason.

LITTLEJOHNS: The United States administration is not exactly very supportive of UNFPA, is it? Haven't they cut back on funding?

MARSHALL: The US hasn't supported UNFPA since 1986 which is a shame.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is that because of the abortion controversy?

MARSHALL: We were accused of supporting programmes of abortion and coercion in China. That's the way it was put and despite several investigations by the US government which found that we supported neither abortion nor coercion in China nor for that matter, anywhere else. Of course, we don't support coercive programmes. Our invitations from 150 countries testify to that. We are not coercing, we are not helping programmes which do coercive.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Marshall, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE.** Our guest has been Alex Marshall, Chief of the Editorial, Publications and Media Services Branch of the United Nations Population Fund. He was interviewed here at United Nations headquarters in New York by: Roy Murphy of TV New Zealand; Judith Aita of USIA Press Service and; Hector Igarza of Prensa Latina.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE.**

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